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## EXTENSION MARKETING INFORMATION PROGRAMS FOR CONSUMERS

Prepared by the  
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U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington 25, D. C.

### SITUATION AND NEED

A greater understanding, by all, of the marketing system is essential to more efficient marketing. The consumers, as well as farmers and marketers, need to be well informed if a more efficient use of resources is to be obtained.

Changes that have come about in our Nation have accentuated the need for a consumer marketing information program for agricultural products. A century ago, consumers were dependent largely on local supplies. Farmers made up a large proportion of the consuming population, and communication between the farmer and nonfarm consumer was not a problem. Today only 13.5 percent of the population is rural farm. Between producer and consumer there is now a vast marketing system which, to become more efficient, requires more effective communications.

#### Consumers Benefit From Marketing Information

Consumers are now faced with thousands of products from which to choose. The food field alone is an excellent example. New products, new forms of old products, new services, and the like are continually adding to the number of choices consumers must make. Since food constitutes the major family expenditure, consumers need adequate, unbiased information which will show them their alternatives and allow them to choose better those products and services which can provide the greatest satisfaction from the time and money spent.

#### Producers and Marketers Benefit From a Better Informed Consumer

Greater knowledge on the part of consumers about such things as supplies and prices of foods would allow consumers to make more rational purchasing decisions among the alternative foods, which, in turn, could contribute to the lessening of price variation for individual food commodities. A greater consumer understanding of such things as new products, services, and grades would likewise permit consumers to make more intelligent choices, which would aid the producers and marketers in making production and marketing decisions.

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## THE ROLE OF MARKETING INFORMATION PROGRAMS FOR CONSUMERS

### They Are a Part of the Total Cooperative Extension Marketing Program

This educational program for consumers is an integral part of the total cooperative extension marketing program. This total marketing program consists of separate, but closely coordinated, programs with producers, marketers, and consumers. They are primarily agricultural economics programs designed to apply economic principles to marketing decisions with the broad objective of assisting people in making wise economic choices among their competing alternatives. Each contributes and is necessary to the broad purpose of the total cooperative extension marketing program--maximizing marketing efficiency.

As a guide to choice making, marketing and outlook information plays an extremely important role in the programs with producers and marketers. It makes up an even larger part of the marketing information program for consumers, a program that could well be regarded as a marketing information and outlook program for consumers. Its overall aim is to provide consumers with marketing and outlook information which will assist them in choosing from among the alternative food products and services those which will give them the greatest satisfaction from their expenditure of time, money, and energy.

In this program, major emphasis is given to providing consumers with localized and timely information on such things as present and prospective supplies, qualities, and prices for the different foods; seasonal price and supply patterns for different foods; costs and purposes of changes in marketing practices, such as new packages and new ways of handling products to assure quality; new products; criteria for identifying quality; and meaning of grades and labels.

### They Relate to Other Extension Programs With Consumers

As indicated above, marketing programs with consumers are primarily concerned with providing consumers information which will assist them in making economic choices. To achieve the objectives of this program, some supplementary information is needed. This information consists of facts on nutrition, use, storage, and preservation. Marketing information programs for consumers receive assistance from, and give support to, other extension programs with consumers, such as the food and nutrition program and the home management program.

### Objectives of Marketing Information Programs for Consumers

The specific objectives of this program, as approved by the marketing subcommittee of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, September 15, 1955, are as follows:

- I. To aid in the orderly marketing of agricultural commodities by--
  - a. Helping to move normal and abnormal supplies.

- b. Encouraging the acceptance of new and improved marketing practices.
  - c. Reporting consumer wants and needs to producers and handlers.
- II. To assist in the more effective use of agricultural products by--
- a. Encouraging consumption of foods in season and in abundant supply.
  - b. Informing consumers of availability, relative cost, selection, care, value, and use of agricultural products.
  - c. Informing consumers about new products.
- III. To help consumers get maximum satisfaction from their purchases of agricultural products by providing them with timely marketing information and economic principles as a basis for decision making in selection, purchase, care, and use of agricultural products with regard to consumer needs and resources.
- IV. To help consumers develop a better understanding of the marketing system, functions, and problems by providing them with information on such subjects as production situation, economic trends, marketing services, marketing costs, marketing margins, and changes in the marketing system.
- V. To motivate people to adopt improved buying practices.

#### Status of the Program

State extension marketing work with consumers was given impetus by the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, which authorized funds for marketing information work on agricultural products.

The first marketing information programs for consumers were started in 1948. Since that time the number of States with programs has more than tripled, and the programs now have an audience potential of one-half the population of the United States. The program has grown rapidly in the last 2 years, both within States and in the addition of new States. An outline of its growth is shown in the following table:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of States with programs</u>	<u>Number of personnel *</u>
1948	11 plus Puerto Rico	16
1952	25 plus Puerto Rico	34
1956	38 plus Puerto Rico and Hawaii	99

\*The number of personnel includes only those devoting full time, or practically full time, to consumer marketing programs. It does not include such people as other marketing specialists, county agents, and others, who help in assembling and disseminating food-marketing information for consumers.



## Program Development and Operation

The job of State extension consumer marketing personnel includes gathering pertinent and accurate marketing information, interpreting it in terms of the consumer's interests, disseminating it to consumers, and evaluating results. In addition, information is provided to institutions, such as restaurants, homes for the aged, and nursing homes. While there is no one right way to conduct this work, the following elements have proved necessary for successful marketing information programs for consumers.

### Firm Groundwork Must Be Established

The administrative and supervisory staff, as well as the subject-matter people concerned in developing plans for the work need to be involved in, and in general agreement with, the program. A committee made up of these people has operated very successfully in many States in initiating the marketing information program for consumers. These committees have generally been appointed by the extension director and have given consideration to the needs for the work, location, objectives, general plan of operation, leadership responsibility, and personnel requirements.

All the new workers need orientation in marketing information work for consumers. The type of orientation depends largely on the background of the individuals. Those trained in marketing may need assistance on methods and procedures; those not trained in marketing may need subject-matter help in addition. In all cases, they need to become familiar with the administrative viewpoint, as well as the viewpoint of subject-matter people. Visits to on-going projects can be effective. It is usually advisable, however, that such visits take place after the workers have become thoroughly familiar with the philosophy and plan of operation for the area in which they are to work.

It is important that all the people with whom it is desirable to work be given an adequate introduction to the marketing information program for consumers. These people can be grouped into three broad categories; one group would include such people as extension workers, people in the communication field, and other professional people who can use marketing information in their work with the public. Providing consumer marketing information for these people makes it possible to reach many more consumers than could be reached by the consumer marketing information personnel alone. These other professional people are also in a position to provide necessary information for workers on consumer marketing programs. The second group includes the trade and producer groups. Consumer marketing personnel are dependent on these people, particularly the trade group, for much needed information. The third group includes the consumers. Consumers need to be oriented as to the objectives of the program and alerted to the service that will be made available to them. Representatives from these three groups are often used to form local advisory committees. The advisory committee helps to determine the needs of consumers and to acquaint others with the program and its accomplishments.

### There Must Be Close Cooperation With the College Staff

Workers on these programs are dependent on many other people for information and assistance. Since this is a marketing program, primary responsibility



for subject-matter supervision should be given to an agricultural economist. It is necessary, also, to have the assistance of other extension specialists, such as those in marketing information and outlook, marketing, production, information, and home economics, as well as resident research and teaching personnel in related areas.

The college staffs can be of invaluable assistance in assembling and interpreting information for consumers. Assistance of the agricultural economists is particularly important in assembling, interpreting, and adapting National and State information. This places on the urban workers on marketing information programs for consumers the responsibility for localization of the information to the urban areas.

To obtain the cooperation and understanding of extension and other college staff personnel and to keep them up to date on developments, many States have organized a technical advisory committee made up of representatives from these groups. Such committees have been extremely helpful to the workers in developing sound, effective information and in coordinating the work with the total extension program and with the total marketing program.

#### Major Emphasis Is Placed on Food

At the beginning, marketing information work with consumers was largely in the food field. There are several reasons for this. Some of our more serious marketing problems are in that area, and approximately 85 percent of the farmer's income is derived from the production of commodities used for food. When the work began, it seemed advisable to limit its scope until methods and techniques were developed to reach consumers effectively. Food also represents one of the major purchasing problems of consumers in terms of family expenditures.

At the present time, a few States have expanded their marketing information programs for consumers to include some work on fibers.

#### Urban Areas Are the Main Target

Most of the consumer marketing work is now being concentrated in the major urban areas. Thus, it is possible to reach large numbers of people, obtain local market information readily, and make more efficient use of the workers' time. Unless up-to-date consumer marketing information is localized and made available regularly, it loses much of its value. Through concentration of effort in major urban areas, this service is made possible.

#### Mass Media Approach Is Needed

Because of limited personnel, it is important to devote major attention to such mass media as radio, television, and newspaper, in order to reach large numbers of people with timely information. Getting other professional people to use this marketing information makes it possible to multiply the efforts of the workers on marketing information programs for consumers. There is stiff competition today for the consumer's attention. This makes it doubly important that the quality of the information and the methods used for getting it out be of high caliber.

Even though using mass media methods to a large extent, it is very important to know the audience reached and continually be alert to consumers' needs and interests.

#### Evaluation Is a Constant Need

Marketing information programs for consumers should be evaluated to determine what people do because of the information provided. Evaluation should also be in terms of what the program has contributed toward a more efficient and effective marketing system.

#### The Role of the Federal Staff

The Consumer-Distributor Marketing Branch of the Division of Agricultural Economics Programs has three staff members. Their general functions are listed below.

- A. Assisting States in the establishment and development of programs.
- B. Assisting States with subject matter.
- C. Assisting States in the training and orientation of personnel.
- D. Assisting States in methods of communication.
- E. Serving as liaison among States, other Federal agencies, and nongovernmental groups.
- F. Preparing reports of future plans and accomplishments of State programs from the State plans of work and annual reports.

In addition, 14 positions are financed entirely with Federal funds under contracts between 6 land-grant colleges and the U. S. Department of Agriculture. These contracts furnish funds to provide information from the following markets: New York City, Boston, Cincinnati, Wheeling, and Kansas City. Also one contract is with Iowa State College to develop basic economic information needed by all consumer information workers.



